

THE GOSPEL IN PRINCIPLE 6 – PART 2

We come back tonight to Principle 6, which reads: “Evaluate all my relationships; offer forgiveness to those who have hurt me, and offer amends for harm I’ve done to others, except when to do so would harm them or others.”

We’re still at Principle 6 because we have been teaching through the Beatitudes in the order Jesus gave them. Remember that he is laying out what the life of a Christian looks like in the Beatitudes, and the life is all about progress, just as working the Twelve Steps and the Eight Principles is about progress.

And the second beatitude that is tied to Principle 6 is this: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (or for our purposes tonight, “children of God”). As we make progress in the beatitudes – as we recognize our poverty of spirit, our grief at our sin and the sins of others, our humility before Jesus, our willingness to do a serious spiritual inventory – we will, Jesus promises, become more merciful, more pure in heart, and tonight, we see how we might become peacemakers.

This should be an encouragement tonight because we all enter recovery, and may still very much be, either peace-breakers or peacekeepers. Peace-breakers are those of us who create wreckage with our compulsive behavior and addictions. And peacekeepers do nothing more than move around wreckage; they don’t help remove it; they just try to maintain, feeling afraid, or tired or despondent that the wreckage can ever be removed.

And Jesus says to all of us who call ourselves children of God, “You are blessed, because as believers who my Father will call His children in heaven, you have the privilege of becoming a peacemaker now.”

He says that our future identity as children of God is our strength and motivation to be peacemakers in our present reality, and as we realize this, and actually become what God promises we are, we receive the blessing that Jesus offers.

This blessing is really important to Jesus. Consider the verse that ties to step 9 (the step that corresponds to principle 6):

²³ So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Living at peace with our brothers and sisters is important enough to Jesus that he says, “Before you come and worship me, be reconciled to your brother.” Maybe we can even say that being reconciled to our brother and sister is in fact a way of worshipping God, because it certainly is something that brings glory to God. Big assignment – but God always commands only what He gives us the power to do. And the power, the ability to be a peacemaker starts with understanding our future identity as a child of God. It is an unshakeable identity, and crucial to our recovery and growth as God’s children. So let’s start with this first really important truth:

God Calls You His Child

Now I just got back last week from an extended vacation, and part of that vacation involved quality time with my family. I have a large family – five kids,

five in-laws, four grandchildren – and I love them all. I love them all even though they are all different in so many ways. The oldest is 32 years old, and the youngest is two months. Men women, boys, girls – and they are in different stages of growth spiritually as well – two pastors, two non-believers, and believers who are struggling with God even as we speak.

There were some really great moments together, and there were some moments that made me realize my need to be a peacemaker – we are far from the perfect family. But no matter who is doing what, or saying that, or hurting another with their behavior, I love them all. Why? – Because they are my children.

And if an angry, perfectionistic control freak can love my family unconditionally (at least I try), think about the blessing it is when Jesus says we shall be called children of God. If God calls you His child, there is nothing that can be done to affect that blessing.

So as we look tonight at the challenge of being a peacemaker, let's start by reminding ourselves who we are in Christ. Our acceptance by our heavenly Father, no matter the depth of our sin, based solely on the righteousness of Jesus, is one of the hardest things for people in recovery to believe in their hearts. Be a peacemaker in your difficult relationships – yes – but first never forget that God calls you His child. Listen to this:

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

There is more than one sermon in just this passage, but a couple of observations:

- Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, was led by the Spirit – into the desert to be tempted, to the Cross – and we, who claim Jesus as our Lord are led by the same, now indwelling Spirit. So Paul calls all who love Jesus “sons of God.”
- We, of course, struggle to follow the Spirit. Our tendency is to believe the lie that we will always be slaves to whatever behavior brings us here tonight. No! You have been given the Spirit of adoption – no more slavery. You call your Father “Abba, Daddy,” not Yahweh. My oldest son still calls my wife “Mommy” in their more affectionate moments. My grandchildren call me “Papa,” not “Mr. Hutchison.” Why? Because they love me and they know we have a special relationship. There is no slavery for those who trust Jesus.
- And we are heirs. In the first century, a woman could never be an heir, so even as we read the term “son of God,” there is blessing for women in this, because you, too are an heir, which only a son could be in the first century.

No slavery; intimate relationship with your heavenly Father; your inheritance awaits you – don’t forget these blessings in the midst of your circumstances right now.

Your Heavenly Father Happens to be the King of Creation

Paul says that we are *adopted* sons. This is special, as well. None of my children or grandchildren is adopted – they were in some sense all surprises. But adopted children are often chosen. Their new parents know them.

(Safford example)

And your new, adopted parent just happens to be the King of Creation. From an orphanage in China to an upper middle class home in Arlington Heights – Maggie’s adoption pales in comparison to your delivery from slavery to adoption by the King of Creation. The King of Creation *chose you!*

In fact, this was His plan for you from before time began:

⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

Nothing surprises your Father. Everything happening to you – everything, including your pain and struggle – is being used by Him as part of His eternal plan to make you more and more like Jesus. The Father disciplines those He loves, and you must remember that He loves you because He chose you.

If you are His child, you cannot be His enemy – impossible. It is not natural for children to be enemies of their parents (although it happens too often, even in Scripture). My family vacation revealed old wounds. There was behavior that was painful and unacceptable. Does that mean that my children are now my enemies? And again, if an angry control freak such as myself can never consider my children as enemies, how can your perfect Father in heaven ever consider you an enemy again?

You Have the Perfect Older Brother

Who do you have to thank for this? We thank Jesus, our great Redeemer, and in the context of God's family, our perfect older brother:

5 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

I get the "perfect older brother" concept from Tim Keller's book *The Prodigal God*. Remember that in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the younger son demands his inheritance from his father, who gives it to him and lets him wander away to squander it, all the while waiting for his return, just as your heavenly Father has waited expectantly and confidently for your return.

But when the younger brother demanded his inheritance, he was also taking money out of the older son's pocket, since upon the father's death, the older brother would have been entitled to twice the younger brother's share. In a real way the older brother gave up a portion of his inheritance when the younger son went prodigal, and the story ends with the older brother stuck in a deep resentment toward both his father and brother. Many of us here tonight, in our flesh, are more like the older brother than we care to admit.

But not Jesus – He is the perfect older brother who "for the joy set before him" willingly gave up all of His inheritance to make peace between you and God. Because of His death, we have been declared to be not only "not guilty," which is what "justified" means, but to have peace with our Father. And because we have peace, reconciliation with the Father, we are now free to live the life of a child of

God, which means we can be peacemakers after the example of our perfect older brother.

How many of us have had an older brother or sister who we idolized – who we wanted to be like in the worst way? Based on who your perfect Brother is, and what He has done for you, don't you want to be like Him in the worst way? And of course this is our calling:

5 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

You Are In a Family of Peacemakers

When the text says to imitate God, it seems virtually impossible. It seems easier to me to imitate Christ, since He was a man. But of course Christ was the God-man, fully God and fully man, so that when we imitate our Older Brother we are also imitating our heavenly Father.

And we can do this. To live a life of love and sacrifice is difficult, but as I've said before, recovery from sin is about progress, not perfection. I don't expect my two-month old daughter to be a peacemaker. My expectations are raised for my adult children, and even then there will missteps and mistakes. The same is true in each of our recoveries. This blessing is near the end of the Beatitudes, and the concept of offering forgiveness and making amends is near the end of the steps, but we are growing more and more in Christ-likeness.

So how do we become the peacemakers God calls us to be?

- First, remember that peace has already been made with God. Jesus did that – he made your amends for you with God. You can never do this, and the gospel of

Jesus Christ is that you don't have to. Jesus is your peacemaker with God. Our job is to be peacemakers with our brothers and sisters. Remember how important this is to Jesus. Imagine if believers really took Matt 5:23-24 seriously. Church attendance would be really down for a while, although God would be glorified by all the peacemaking going on before everyone came back to church!

- Second – pray. Step 8 says, “We made a list of persons we had harmed.” Who do you need to make peace with? You'll probably start by reviewing step 4, but do this part prayerfully and with the help of your sponsor. And while many of us are working the steps for the first time, praying about who you need to make peace with is part of the lifestyle of imitating God.

And as you pray, remember how your older brother prayed: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Who are you in conflict with that you need to pray for? Is it hard? Do you have a sponsor to talk to about it? Do they know how they've hurt you? Were they capable of not doing it? That's the forgiveness prayer. You owe amends as well, and so another prayer would be: “Father forgive me, for I know what I have done.” No “buts” – just humble confession before the Lord.

Pray for wisdom. Pray for the right words to say. Not only was my family vacation helpful in pointing me to the blessing of God's family, it reminded me of my need to be a peacemaker. It turns out I was doing way too much under my own power and not trusting God, or talking to God nearly enough. It's funny

how conflict and pain drives us to cry out in prayer. In my peacemaking I have to pray much, much more and fix much, much less. James 3:17-18:

¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

- Third – submit. It is not “my will be done.” It is, “Thy will be done.” Your older brother lived a life of perfect submission. While He willingly went to the Cross for you, it wasn’t easy. Remember Gethsemane. But He did it for you, and if we are to be led, as Jesus was, by the Spirit of God, remember what it said in Romans 8:17: “and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” See the importance of the language of step 8: “We became willing to make amends to them all.” The conversations that will bring peace may be difficult, and you may be far from willing right now. But God has you in this process of recovery to make you a peacemaker now, so that He can call you a “son of God” later. Trust God – He has you right where He wants you.
- Listen. Listen to the Spirit speaking truth about the relationship, and listen to the person. Be clear about how they’ve been hurt. Understand the situation by listening not only to your own thoughts, but more importantly to what the other person has said or is saying.
- Finally, then, speak the truth in love. Psalm 85:10 is a picture of the character of God:

¹⁰ Steadfast love and faithfulness meet;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.

His steadfast love for us never ends, and so He is eternally faithful to His children. He is righteous, and holy, and our Judge. But he also brings healing on His wings, because at the Cross, as Jesus died to make peace with Him, righteousness and peace kiss. It is the kiss of healing. It is what God is doing to clean up the wreckage of this fallen world, and as a child of God, as a child in a family of peacemakers, you have the blessing of helping Him. You are no longer a peace-breaker, making wreckage – you are a child of God. You are no longer a peacekeeper, unable to clean up the wreckage – you are a child of God. You are a peacekeeper – that's what a child of God is. Be blessed by the truth, and empowered to be who you are in Christ.